

Enhancing the teaching of drama:
school-based, needs-driven professional learning

Rachel Perry (nee Darell)

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NB Figures 3.5, 4.1, 6.1 and 8.1 are the same diagram revisited in the different chapters.

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Abstract

This thesis examines how the teaching of drama can be enhanced through needs-driven, school-based professional learning. It was motivated by a personal ‘living contradiction’, involving the frustration that can result when beliefs and actions do not correspond. My learning journey continued through literature searches and preliminary work with teachers that resulted in an effective process of professional learning with five teachers.

The research design draws on elements of action research, situated, and action learning theories, to develop a process of ‘*facilitated action research*’. Informed, but not limited by existing models of action research, this collaborative process was responsive to teacher preferences in addressing the three research aims. Evolving over two phases with eleven teachers, the bulk of the study followed the stories of five teachers and their professional learning. Data collection tools included the use of semi-structured interviews, conversations, a questionnaire, survey and reflective journals.

The findings demonstrated that professional learning, responsive to context and self-identified needs, positively enhanced the teaching of drama. Teacher confidence and awareness of drama gradually increased, as did teacher ability to self-direct learning. Areas of skill development, integration and time management were initially identified as a focus for professional learning, with classroom and behaviour management added as school-based issues arose. Establishing a ‘common understanding of drama’ was acknowledged as critical for effective collaborative learning to take place. Personal factors including confidence, experience and belief, and the contextual factors of parental expectation, outcomes, time, space and past professional learning were found to facilitate or constrain drama use. The research found that professional learning, characterised by a respect for past experiences, assisted in the creation of a ‘safe space’ for learning. Tailoring professional learning to needs and the school context was also found to motivate teachers and was effective in enhancing the teaching of drama. My role as ‘facilitator’ became embedded in the collaborative process, adding to a personal understanding of role and school-based learning.

This study is significant for teachers, professional learning facilitators and those working in drama education. It contributes to the minimal research emphasising professional learning for drama, and strengthens existing arguments for needs-driven, school-based teacher development.